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AUTHOR Orum, Lori S.
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ABSTRACT

The National Council of La Raza's position on the reauthorization of Title I of the Higher Education Act is detailed in this paper, which was presented as testimony to the House Postsecondary Education Subcommittee. The paper begins by concurring with the assessment that, as long as Title I remains a largely untargeted program which serves students who probably do not need Federal assistance to upgrade their education and employment skills, Congress should not divert scarce funds to make monies available. An argument is presented next that certain disadvantaged groups (particularly Hispanics) do, however, have a significant need for continuing education programs at the postsecondary level. To support this assertion, data on the under-education of Hispanic Americans is outlined. In general, it is said, a large portion of Hispanic adults are not adequately served by the postsecondary education system because of poor academic preparation, marginal levels of literacy, and lack of financial resources for full-time attendance at four-year colleges and universities. Following this discussion, six changes in Title I legislation are recommended. These emphasize the importance of targeting traditionally underrepresented groups; evaluating the ways in which postsecondary education is limited by race, language, sex, and age; encouraging the participation of community-based organizations in funded programs; and the provision of preservice training for child care workers and volunteer training for literacy projects. The paper's conclusion re-asserts the great need for continuing education programs aimed at Hispanic adults. (KH)

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TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO

THE HOUSE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE

ON

THE REAUTHORIZATION OF TITLE I OF THE

HIGHER EDUCATION ACT

Presented by

Lori S. Orum
Senior Education Policy Analyst

for

Raul Yzaguirre
President
National Council of La Raza
20 F Street, N.W., Second Floor
Washington, D.C. 20001
(202) 628-9600

Presented on Behalf of

The Hispanic Higher Education Coalition

September 5, 1985

UD024455

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, my name is Lori S. Orum, and I am the Senior Education Policy Analyst at the National Council of La Raza. I am here representing Raul Yzaguirre, President of the National Council of La Raza, one of the nation's largest Hispanic policy analyis and technical assistance organizations. I am also here on behalf of the Hispanic Higher Education Coalition -- an organization comprised of 14 national Hispanic organizations dedicated to improving postsecondary educational opportunities for Americans of Hispanic descent. I appreciate the opportunity to come before you today and share with you our recommendations for the improvement of Title I of the Higher Education Act.

As this Committee is well aware, Title I, which supports efforts to provide continuing education opportunities for adult learners, has not been funded for the last several years. When Congress acted in 1981 to reduce government spending, funding for Title I was eliminated. Congress in its wisdom acted to direct the available federal resources in education to students with the greatest need, and Title I in its 1980 form would not have served such students. Department of Education studies have shown that students participating in traditional continuing education programs tend to have a higher income and more education -- and are more likely to be employed and hold a professional or managerial job -- than the general population.

Since most of these students will have access to continuing education without federal intervention, we concur with the Congressional Research Service's assessment of the current programs authorized by Title I that "the appropriate and justifiable Federal role is unclear." As long as Title I remains a largely untargeted program, serving students who probably do not need federal assistance to upgrade their education and employment skills, Congress should not divert scarce funds to make monies available for this title.

However, the National Council of La Raza and the Hispanic Higher Education Coalition do believe that, for certain disadvantaged groups, there is a significant

national need for continuing education programs at the postsecondary level. This is particularly true among the adult Hispanic population.

Hispanic Americans, the most rapidly growing subpopulation in our nation, are among the least educated of all Americans. Hispanics are less likely than Blacks or Whites to participate in and graduate from the traditional postsecondary educational system. Hispanics are less likely to be eligible to participate in this system -- with higher dropout rates and lower incidence of enrollment in academically-oriented high school curricula than other groups of students. National data indicate that approximately half of Mexican American and Puerto Rican youth do not finish high school. Only 26% of Hispanic high school seniors are enrolled in a college preparatory curriculum as compared to 39% of Whites, 32% of Blacks and 52% of Asians. Thus, three out of four Hispanic high school graduates have not had adequate educational preparation to enroll in our colleges and universities.

Among Hispanics who earn high school diplomas, about half never go to college. Even those who have graduated from high school with a college-preparatory course of study are less likely than White students to be eligible and competitive for admission to four-year colleges and universities. For example, in California, where the state operates both the University of California (UC) system and the California State University (CSU) systems, only a small minority of Hispanic high school graduates are eligible to apply for admission to either system. According to the California Postsecondary Education Commission, while 15.5% of White California high school graduates meet the eligibility criteria for the UC system, only 4.9% of Hispanic graduates meet these admission guidelines. In the CSU system, which has somewhat lower entrance requirements, 33.5% of White graduates meet the admission guidelines, compared to only 15.3% of Hispanic graduates.

Research also indicates that Hispanic Americans are also more likely to suffer from functional or marginal illiteracy than are other groups of Americans. As the

public is increasingly aware, possession of a high school diploma does not necessarily connote literacy at a sufficient level to participate in the traditional postsecondary education system. When literacy is defined by such practical criteria as ability to interpret a bus schedule, address a letter so that it reaches its destination, or read an explanation of finance charges from a bank -- which is far less than the level of literacy needed to succeed in postsecondary education -- research indicates that 56% of Hispanic Americans could be considered functionally illiterate, in comparison with 47% of Blacks, and 16% of Whites.

In addition to poor academic preparation at the elementary and secondary levels, limited financial resources also play a role in restricting Hispanic access to traditional postsecondary institutions. Hispanics are more likely than the "average American" to be poor. Hispanic Americans earn less per hour than any other group, and nearly 30% of Hispanic families live below the federal poverty level.

Hispanics are more likely than other groups to participate in higher education on a part-time basis, and most Hispanics attending college are enrolled in low-cost two-year colleges. Fully 54% of Hispanics pursing higher education in 1980 were enrolled in two-year colleges, compared to 36% of Whites and 43% of Blacks. Although some students do transfer to four-year institutions and complete bachelor's degrees, students in four-year institutions are more than twice as likely to complete a bachelor's degree within nine years as are students who begin their education in two-year colleges.

Attrition rates for Hispanics throughout the traditional postsecondary system are high. While 61% of White youth entering college earn degrees, only 32% of Mexican Americans and 28% of Puerto Ricans finish college. Blacks are the only group less likely than Hispanics to complete college. Only 24% of Black students who enter college earn degrees.

Due to poor academic preparation, marginal levels of literacy, and lack of financial resources for full-time attendance at four-year colleges and universities,

a large proportion of Hispanic adults find that traditional postsecondary education system does not meet their needs. As national studies have shown, low levels of education and marginal English literacy continue to retard the earning potential of Hispanic adults. In fact, limited education and language difficulties have been shown to be two of the most significant barriers to productive employment for Hispanics.

In order that Title I may begin to address the very real continuing education needs of Hispanic adults, the National Council of La Raza and the Hispanic Higher Education Coalition recommend that the Subcommittee consider the following changes in the legislation:

1. Provide federal assistance to institutions in providing continuing education, but target such assistance to programs which serve individuals who are among the most underrepresented in traditional postsecondary education programs. These include adults who have been inadequately served by the educational system during youth, those whose access to postsecondary education has been severely limited, and those who have suffered barriers due to age, sex, race, handicap or national origin.

2. Include a study within Title I to evaluate the extent to which race, language, sex or age represent barriers to participation in postsecondary education. The study should also review the availability and effectiveness of outreach, information, or supportive services programs in encouraging participation in continuing postsecondary education, with particular attention to programs serving adults such as homemakers, retirees, or individuals with limited-English proficiency.

3. Include as eligible grantees for such funds, community-based organizations and community-based education institutions.

4. Limit federal discretionary grants to institutions of higher education to those institutions which apply jointly with community-based organizations or community-based education institutions to operate cooperative programs.

5. Include as allowable purposes of such grants the provision of preservice training to teachers and administrative personnel involved in child care programs, including the recruitment and training of low-income parents in early childhood education, and the development of programs to assist such individuals in becoming certified home child care providers.

6. Include as allowable purposes of such grants the provision of training programs for volunteers and college work-study students to work in literacy projects and other community-based educational programs.

As an aside, the National Council of La Raza and the Hispanic Higher Education Coalition urge that the Subcommittee, in its deliberations on other titles of this Act, consider ways in which work-study and cooperative education students can be encouraged to contribute more effectively to community-based education programs, especially those involved in improving the literacy of limited-English proficient adults. I have recently become aware of one example of the excellent results this type of collaboration can bring. The University of Southern California has made a number of its work-study students available to work in partnership with an Hispanic community-based organization in Los Angeles to provide tutoring services to low-achieving students. The organization, Desarollo Estudiantil Hispano, coordinates the services, and parents pay for tutoring on a sliding fee scale. This partnership has helped several hundred Hispanic students improve their academic performance dramatically. There is such demand for this tutoring that the organization has a large waiting list. Work-study and cooperative education students represent a tremendous resource in community education projects serving adults as well. A federal continuing education grant to a university or college and a community-based organization engaged in such an endeavor could go a long way in encouraging more of these partnerships.

In closing, let me reiterate that Title I should not remain an untargeted program, either in terms of the students to be served or the type of institutions to receive federal support. There is a tremendous need for continuing education programs among Hispanic adults, to help them become fully literate and remedy the deficits of education programs which did not prepare them for higher education, to provide them opportunities on a part-time basis to gain certification for a variety of fields and licenses, and to enable them to gain skills which will help

them advance out of low-paying, dead-end jobs. These programs, especially when targeted to marginally literate adults, will be most effective when operated through or in partnership with community-based organizations which typically have much better outreach, information and support services in disadvantaged communities than do institutions of higher education operating alone.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.